

Guest Opinion from Congressman Greg Walden
“A Solution to the Meth Epidemic Will Take a Multi-Pronged Approach”

The scourge of methamphetamine is devastating lives and communities throughout Oregon, especially in rural areas.

One thing I learned during the seven methamphetamine summits I held this year, including one in Klamath Falls, is that the problem requires a multi-pronged approach: prevention, treatment, law enforcement and government action at all levels.

On June 16, the *Herald and News* wrote that meth “should be attacked at every level” and the federal government needs to “try a national approach.”

I agree.

Every day, more of my colleagues realize how corrosive meth is, and while we face a terrible problem in Oregon, no state is immune.

I applaud efforts by Governor Kulongoski and the state legislature in making pseudoephedrine, a necessary ingredient to produce meth, more difficult to obtain and for making Oregon a national leader in the fight against meth. Unfortunately, having laws limiting access to ingredients in select states will only shift the problem elsewhere, not eliminate it.

In light of this, I have cosponsored legislation that would make pseudoephedrine a Schedule V drug, requiring behind the counter sales nationwide. I have also been in contact with federal agencies and pharmaceutical companies to encourage the formulation of new products using a decongestant effective for medical purposes, but that cannot be used to manufacture meth.

I have cosponsored other legislation to combat meth and am urging the House leadership to schedule those for consideration soon.

- The “Combat Meth Act” (HR 314) would provide resources and tools necessary to increase community awareness, establish new treatment options, and for law enforcement and prosecutors to crack down on meth producers and distributors.
- The “Methamphetamine Remediation Act” (HR 798) would direct the Environmental Protection Agency to develop guidelines by which communities can clean-up meth labs, essentially toxic waste sites.
- The “Protecting Children from Drugs Act” (HR 1616) would increase the maximum possible sentence for manufacturing an illicit drug in the presence of a child.

Aside from key policy changes, the federal government must make a commitment to combat methamphetamine by providing the funding and resources necessary for local law

enforcement officials and drug prevention organizations – those fighting the battle on the front lines – to successfully complete their objectives.

Last week the House voted to increase funding in appropriations legislation for the fight against meth by \$72 million, including an additional \$40 million for the Community Oriented Policing Services program, an additional \$22 million for Byrne Grants, and an additional \$10 million for the Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) efforts to fight international meth trafficking.

The DEA has had success in cracking down on meth imports (both the finished product and precursor ingredients) from Canada through a program called "Operation Northern Star." My hope is that they can build on their success in reducing meth trafficking from the north as they engage in cooperative educational and training efforts in Mexico to curb the problem from the south. Also, given the Department of Homeland Security's jurisdiction over our borders, I have been in contact with Secretary Chertoff about the Department's efforts to eliminate meth trafficking into America, while also doing more to tackle the overarching problem of strengthening our borders and curbing illegal immigration.

Though a national issue, local communities are forced to face the problem head on and I have been able to learn a great deal from District Attorney Ed Caleb, Sheriff Tim Evinger, the Klamath County Methamphetamine Task Force and organizations such as Oregon Partnership. An important aspect of my efforts to fight meth is taking what I have learned from them and other law enforcement, treatment and prevention professionals and work with federal agencies and departments to get help.

Twice last year I had the Deputy Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Scott Burns, travel with me to our District to hear firsthand the problems we face when it comes to the use, production and trafficking of meth. Additionally, Mr. Burns was my guest on a video I produced to educate folks on the issue. I will continue to remain actively engaged with the ONDCP as we move forward in our efforts.

We are indeed taking a multi-pronged approach to solving a problem that, while daunting, can be overcome. The *Herald and News* is also right: "there is no silver bullet."

I am committed to doing all I can to make sure the federal government does its part to help people in our communities receive the educational, treatment and law enforcement tools they need.

Congressman Walden has represented Oregon's Second District since 1999 and is a member of the Congressional Caucus to Fight and Control Methamphetamine. More information on his work on methamphetamine issues can be found at www.walden.house.gov.